

view: Top stories

Co-op mine strike draws national attention to workers, local mine operations

A strike that began at the Co-op Mine in Sept. of 2003 carried on into 2004 and while it was ended later in the year, issues from that work stoppage have still not been resolved.

During the whole time both sides have engaged in a war of words through the media since the labor action started. The work stoppage not only gained statewide coverage by the television stations and in newspapers across Utah, but national attention was brought to the situation primarily through the efforts of the United Mine Workers of America. The UMWA had attempted to organize the mine workers when the stoppage began.

Adding to the media's interest is the fact that Co-op or CW Mining Company is owned by the Kingstons, one of Utah's most well-known polygamist families. High profile cases involving polygamy have resulted in a media spot-

light on what would normally be considered as a small labor dispute.

"We have had support from all over Utah," stated Allison Kennedy during the *Sun Advo-*

The buses and vehicles brought dozens of supporters from various labor organizations as well as human rights groups. But the call to support the picketers has gone farther than union groups. Religious organizations, women and family advocates as well as Latino support groups have joined in the effort.

According to the workers, the strike began as a protest when Bill Estrada was allegedly fired for trying to bring the UMWA into the mine.

Management of the mine, however, claimed Estrada was fired because he failed to fill out a report properly regarding a safety system on a continuous mining machine.

When the *Sun Advocate* interviewed CW's personnel director Charles Reynolds in October of 2003, he said all the miners left the mine after the protest and never came back to

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cates visit to the picket lines in early April. "And a great deal from many places around the United States as well."

In February, buses and numerous vehicles came to the corner where Huntington Canyon and Bear Canyon join and where the picketers stood day in and day out.

tos of the year

The *Sun Advocate* staff selected these photos as some of the best that were published during the year. They were all taken by staff members of the paper.

Each year thousands of photos are taken in the area by reporters, advertising representatives, production personnel and editors from the paper. Many



The year in review: Top

Co-op mine strike draws national attention:

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work.

After three days, the coal company decided the miners had quit.

But the workers maintained all along they were locked out of the mine.

Numerous miners that were involved in the picketing process did not speak English.

Of the five dozen plus miners that were affected by the labor dispute, Estrada indicated at the time about half have found other jobs, but some continued to picket when they are not working.

At the time the CW Mining's practices were under investigation by the National Labor Relations Board and that continued into the summer when a hearing was held in Price concerning a number of matters including who could vote in a vote for the UMWA to act as representation for the miners.

After some rulings by the NLRB many of the workers returned to work, while the dispute over the mine certification continued.

In September the CW Mining Company filed a lawsuit against a number of people, organizations and companies concerning the work stoppage and the consequent negative media attention.

The headliner in the suit was the United Mine Workers of America, but both the *Deseret Morning News*, and four of its reporters that covered the situation, as well as the *Salt Lake Tribune* and eight of its news people were named. The two local papers, the *Sun Advocate* and the *Emery County Progress*, were also named in the suit. But the next week a mine official contacted the publisher of both papers and told him that the two local papers were added to the suit by mistake and their names were being withdrawn from it.

The near 80 page filing stated that the striking workers cost the C.W. Mining Company nearly a million dollars, and that statements issued by individuals, along with

statements made in the press by others who supported them, defamed the owners and the company.

The suit also named as plaintiffs the International Association of United Workers Union and some individuals who are associated with both the existing union and the company. The strikers claimed that the union that still exists in the mine now (IAUWU) is a company union run by company managers.

Besides the above local media sources, also named in the suit is the United Mine Workers of America, the AFL-CIO, the Socialist Workers Party and their publication *The Militant*, Jobs with Justice, the Roman Catholic Church, the Tapestry Against Polygamy, the Center for Public Education and Information on Polygamy, the Listeners Community Radio of Utah, Inc., Salt Lake City Codepink, the Utah Progressive Network, and the Earth Island Institute, Inc. along with a number of other media and union affiliated groups. Also named were many of the strikers, as well as individuals within the various organizations and media outlets.

The plaintiff's first claim for relief concerned unfair labor practices, and the second claim, that directly involved the media sources, was about defamation. The suit mentioned dozens and dozens of comments made by various people about the situation that were reported in the publications.

Then in December the mine let go approximately 30 workers from the mine, not long before the election to support or not support the UMWA took place.

According to Cecil Roberts, president of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) International, the move was a blatant retaliation against miners for wanting a real union.

"Here we are, less than a week away from a vote for union representation, and the mine operator has conveniently decided to fire a significant number of the miners

who are eligible voters," stated Roberts. "Mind you, CW Mining has allowed many of these so-called undocumented workers to labor in the Co-op mine for years without questioning the status of their citizenship. It was only after these miners finally decided to fight to improve their livelihoods through legitimate union representation that the employer started playing hardball..."

However, according to a letter distributed to the workers prior to their dismissal by mine manager Charles Reynolds, the United States Social Security Administration had notified the company earlier in the year that the Social Security numbers that had been provided by the employees were not valid and, to date, the recipients had purportedly not corrected the discrepancy.

"Federal law prohibits CW Mining Company from knowingly continuing the employment of workers who do not have the proper documentation showing that they are eligible to work in the United States," stated the company's letter.

Reynolds indicated that when a former employee of the mining company was arrested for illegal activity not connected with his employment, it was determined that he was reportedly in the U.S. illegally.

Reynolds informed the employees that they must verify their legal status on or before Dec. 9, 2004 and warned that failure to do so would result in their termination.

Some terminations of other workers also took place in or about the same time for other reasons.

Finally, only a week later the election was held. But the results had not been tabulated by the time the year ended largely due to challenges on the majority of the ballots, based on NLRB rulings about which workers at the mine were eligible to vote in the election.

This story will certainly stretch into 2005 and maybe beyond that.

Carbon towns

East Carbon and Sunnyside voters decided this year whether the two cities would be consolidated together this year, and the end the answer was no.

The movement to join the two towns gained momentum last in 2003 and the debate carried over until the general election this year.

Placing the matter on the November ballot was brought about by actions from the communities through two different avenues.

The East Carbon City Council agreed to approach the county commission about putting the issue to a vote after a committee of citizens formed last fall recommended that the cities consider the move.

However, Sunnyside officials decided that the city council would not make the decision about placing the consolidation issue on the ballot for a public vote.

Following the city's decision, supporters of the consolidation proposal collected signatures on a petition from Sunnyside residents favoring the movement to merge the towns.

The petition contained signatures when the document was turned into the Carl County Clerk's Office.

Under state statute, the petition had to contain the signature of 10 percent of the registered voters in Sunnyside's registered voters in order to proceed with consolidation on the ballot. The number collected by supporters exceeded the requirement.

The movement gained momentum in August of 2004 when almost 70 citizens from East Carbon, Columbia and Sunnyside met at the ABC Lear